

## **Child Care Program Teaches Healthy Lifestyle Habits**

### ***Issue***

Only one in five children eats at least five servings of vegetables and fruits a day, as recommended by the National Cancer Institute. American children spend more time watching television and playing video games than doing anything else, except sleeping. Overweight is a serious health concern for children and adolescents.

Data from two National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (1976–1980 and 2003–2004) show that the prevalence of overweight is increasing for children 2 to 5 years old, from 5 percent to 13.9 percent. And, according to the current data, almost 80 percent of children aged 5 years and younger with working mothers are in childcare for an average of 40 hours a week.

### ***Intervention***

Partnering with daycares would be a strategic way to share the responsibility of making sure children eat healthy and exercise regularly. The S.C. Department of Health and Environment of Control (DHEC) approached the Aiken County First Steps Director about partnering to bring Color Me Healthy, a physical and nutritional activity program for four- to five-year-olds, to local child care providers. When reviewing the materials, the First Steps Director commented on how easily the curriculum could be used to promote literacy as well as health. Thanks to staff time and funds from the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, DHEC Region 5 staff conducted the first Color Me Healthy training in Aiken for 61 daycare instructors in August 2008. The initiative was so well received and well attended, a second training was conducted the following month, reaching 63 instructors.

Providers completed a survey regarding eating habits within their centers, which proved quite informative:

- Providers acknowledged during the training that they often offered unhealthy snacks because they were easy to prepare;
- Parents would bring cupcakes, cookies, potato chips, juice, cake and brownies for special occasions; and
- When instructors asked why they didn't serve vegetables and fruits, respondents answered that kids would not eat it, and that it was too much trouble. Color Me Healthy taught them how to make it fun and easy.

### ***Impact***

This effort builds on the successes that occurred with Color Me Healthy during 2007-2008, when DHEC Region 5 reached 30 daycares across five counties, touching over 700 children. Adding to that in recent months, Aiken has reached 24 daycares to date, bringing the total to 54.

- The Aiken County First Steps Director participated in the Color Me Healthy training and encouraged all of the centers to use the curriculum on a regular basis. Because we know that overweight children are more likely to be overweight adults, the Director, in partnership with DHEC, continues to actively work with centers that attend trainings. Future plans include the recruitment of additional daycares in Aiken to participate in upcoming Color Me Healthy trainings.
- DHEC Region 5 will conduct an evaluation survey within three months of the training. Additionally, DHEC Region 5 will schedule follow-up trainings for Families Eating Smart Moving More, as well as the Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care Program.

**Contact:** Barbara Grice, Regional Health Education Director  
S. C. Department of Health and Environmental Control – Region 5  
1550 Carolina Avenue, Orangeburg, SC 29115  
(803) 533-7276; [Griceba@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:Griceba@dhec.sc.gov)